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## THE RELIGIOUS FORECAST IN ENGLAND.

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THE religious situation in England may perhaps come to be a religious crisis. Sharp voices fill the air; and there are sighs for that in the past which has gone down irretrievably, and aspirations after what has yet to rise upon us in the future. Yet, speaking as a mere outside observer—a fly upon that great wheel for the last fifty years—I do not think that the driving forces of religion in the present, or its chances for the future, have altered very much during that long time, or even during the century gone by. At the present moment there is keen resentment roused by the recent Education Act. It was probably unwise, and was certainly an innovation on that passive defense of the *status quo* which was long ago recommended to the English Establishment by Sir Robert Peel. But all establishment is in the free state presumably indefensible, and an institution even of injustice requires sooner or later to be added to, if it is not to decline. Again, within the Church of England itself there is not so much change as the literary onlooker might suppose. The Oxford movement has during the last fifty years deeply affected the clergy, and has also swept into it women and æsthetes from the upper classes. But it has left the mass of the laity unmoved, if not indeed repelled; and the great majority of earnest church people are dumbly and obstinately Protestant. Twice at least in the course of the present Parliament a distinguished prime minister, with an enormous majority

behind him, had to withdraw well-planned overtures for conciliating high-churchism or Rome, in face of imminent revolt in his own party and in the Commons. Between this high-church clergy and low-church laity there was at one time what could claim to be a broad-church party. If it has melted away, it is because its work is now less needed, and the resulting critical sediment has been diffused among reading men not unequally on both sides. Hence arise, on the part of the clergy, powerful manifestoes like *Lux Mundi*, while the less articulate laity find representation of their low-churchism rather on the outside, among dissenters or in parliament. For the possibilities of the English religious situation, now as at all times, do not turn solely on the Church of England. They depend rather on a Protestant England, within which there is an ancient church in unstable equilibrium—a Protestant England, flanked by Scotland on the one side and Ireland on the other, and looking abroad to a Latin communion in the south, and to Germany and America on the east and west.

Churches and parties are held to be very external things. But if you go deeper into matters of individual reason and conviction, it may be doubted here also whether the religious question of the present time is absolutely new, or can hope for an immediate solution. Take the influence of biblical criticism alone. That influence tends in some ways to strengthen the authority of the church, and to suggest that it, and not Scripture, is the pillar and ground of the truth. Yet this is balanced by the constraint which criticism lays, even on churchmen, to plead their church claim before the double tribunals of historical evidence and original Christianity. Among the English laity, within and without the church, there are very many men whom a modern teaching has set free to grasp and use the principles of the early faith, while they are no longer troubled as to mere details of its records, and thus cultivate, on their own behalf, as on that of others, the new virtue of tolerance all around. It is well, but the men of this tolerant virtue—*how strive they*, as compared with their fathers, upon whose souls Wesley and Chalmers smote; or with the evangelical households of last century, which fed on Olney hymns and built up missionary societies; or even with the more ardent souls who stood in the van of the Oxford "movement"? Here again there is a cer-

tain unexpected equipoise. It once more suggests to us that the forces of the religious situation in England, while they are greatly enlarged, and perhaps enriched beyond what they were a few generations ago, are not *relatively* much changed. There are no longer, indeed, the old hard-and-fast lines between the sections; the life which has vivified each of them, and made it plastic and somewhat passive, has also interfused and so far reconciled the whole. For such reasons I avoid questions ecclesiastical and political, and decline to follow those who inquire into the chances of the immediate future. I am more attracted here by the thinkers who take this up as a chapter in the philosophy of the history, and who seek to determine, not what England will presently be—nor even what it ought now to be—but what sooner or later it must necessarily be.

More than one philosophy—idealist, or semi-idealist, or anything but idealist—has confronted this problem, and seemed to itself to solve it because the conclusions were couched in its own phraseology. Such efforts, however vigorous, I pass by. But behind them all there is the pressure of one great movement, the strength of a constraining presupposition or common thought. The pressure is that of the scientific spirit, and the thought is that the religious situation, in England as everywhere else, is merely a step in the process of the subjective evolution of religion. England is no doubt a peculiar, and in some respects a very peculiar, country. But English religion is merely the universal religion as that is found in England today. It is the same water here as on every shore—an influx from a world-stream; only here it flows in a narrow channel, and between English banks, barriers, and limitations. But if so, while in the present it is the English peculiarities and differentia that strike the eye, is it not certain that in the future—the immediate future, and the further future in a rapidly increasing ratio—the forces molding and governing and impelling it will be simply the central laws of religious evolution? It is they that will roll out the half-baked, half-fused, imperfectly stratified, and imperfectly crystallized mass of English religious and social life into something progressively better and more beautiful. And if, as most men—and most wise men—earnestly believe, Christianity is historically the highest form of religion or religions, then English religion, already predominantly Christian, needs only

the application to the molding of its future of the ordinary psychological laws. In the expectation of some, it will be essentially a church religion, and not one of separate and individual convictions. In the expectation of others, it will be a religion of culture, or even itself a mere form of culture. In point of fact, such a religion would almost certainly be *both*, and would embrace or tolerate very many subvarieties inside and outside of these main roots. I have spoken of the peculiarities of English religion. But, admittedly, the great peculiarity of England, and still more of English religion, is that it has long held historically, and is proud to hold, an intermediate position, resting on a basis of mere compromise. It has done so for centuries, and we have seen that the tendency of criticism and other recent influences is to intermediate still more, and to soften the angles of conviction that remain. If so, the task of evolution is in this case already largely anticipated. For while development of the kind desired should elevate religion, it will certainly average and equalize it; not by refusing civil or social privileges to any views, however extreme (the day for that has nearly passed away), but by embracing and harmonizing all on a basis of subjectivity, and treating religion itself as a legitimate or necessary expression of the nature of man.

Such, generally, is the forecast. The objection to it, as a philosophical or evolutionary theory, is that it ignores the ultimate fact of evolution itself—which is also the fact on which English and all other religion must build.

Take evolution in its rawest, and least religious, form. We have to begin with, nothing but matter. But out of matter arise gradually, not only symmetry or crystallization, but organization and growth, both resulting in a world of unconscious vegetable life. Then far down in the history of that unconscious world this amazing thing happens: it develops bodies which not only collide with other bodies, but are conscious of the collision—nay more, which perceive the world which is around them, and feel and act accordingly. And in an era farther on, the selected highest of these perceptive animal forms are raised to an astonishingly higher plane still. For the time comes when in these a new idea arises—an idea for which millenniums of the mere knowledge of *that which is* could never have prepared them—the quite other question: What *ought to be*? And now the uni-

verse, which was apparently dead matter to begin with, has become an intelligent and a moral universe; it has evolved, that is, as its highest products certain beings who not only investigate all that exists, but who judge of what ought to exist, and even judge themselves. Apparently, the chief aim and furthest attainment of this system of things is to evolve personalities. But these are beings to whose mind and heart evolution can itself speak. And its last word to them is, that the source and center of the universe must be the center as well as the source of all the personality that is in it. They are personalities themselves, the most precious products that we see. But they are fleeting and frail—mere bubbles that form and break as the world-stream moves. Yet that too is a stream that flows from a fountain; and the source of personality must be infinitely more intense than is any exemplification of it here. Yet each of these has a spark transmitted (or perhaps only reflected) from the center; sufficient, therefore, for mutual relation and mutual recognition, perhaps even for mutual response.

Throughout all history religion has been no mere subjective phenomenon. It has been the tie between men and the central Personality of the universe. Their apprehension of it—say rather, of Him—was at first distorted or fragmentary; but in modern times evolution is perhaps doing as much as Christianity to insure that we shall never think of the universe without thinking of its oneness and its center, and that, if we admit religion into our thoughts at all, to us there is but one God. In earlier days he appealed to the mass of men, not so much as the central Mind or the central Heart, but rather as the central Conscience of the universe, from which none could escape, and to which all might appeal. The arbitrary and avenging powers of mythology had no evolutionary future, but the Hebrew recognition of a Judge of all the earth—"a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he!"—prevailed over the more local and limited ideas of that race as of all others. It prevailed, but not at all by being softened down into a vague enjoyment of subjectivity or of legend. The trend was very much otherwise. Their God, more and more acknowledged as the God of all, became also more and more the God with whom they had to do. And even when the national ethic was sublimed into loving the seen neighbor as

oneself, it demanded first of all for one Unseen a love with all the heart and with all the soul and with all the mind. Of course, under a God-consciousness so direct as this all self-complacency broke down. It was exchanged in the multitude for a wistful look at the altar, and in select souls for an inward cry for forgiveness, while the lesson taught to both by the whole story, as prophet after prophet unfolded it to the world, was personal dealing with that divine Personality.<sup>1</sup> And this evolution of the individual out of the nationalist or multitudinist mass is a process which has never been reversed. Even before Christianity and outside Palestine, it had become plain that the religious future of our race could not always be constrained within the original solidarity of the savage family, the civic commune, the sacerdotal guild, and the conquering empire. And so philosopher, stoic, and mystic anticipated the beliefs of the future, and relieved the oppressed heart of their own present, when they individually turned to the unknown God or central *Anima Mundi*. But then came Christianity with its leap to a higher plane. Throwing down all middle walls between Greek and barbarian, it made instantaneous appeal to men of every race to seek personal reconciliation with the Cause and Father of all. Incidentally, it may be remarked that it is by no means clear that the response of the barbarian was less prompt, or less important for the history of the past, or even less likely to be repeated in the future, than that of the "Greek." But the main fact is that the question was no longer one of races at all. Races were merely the vague, and generally the mistaken, names of groups of individual men with personalities infinitely apart, every one of which was now invited to become "partaker of the divine nature" by a process of beholding that other Personality with open face. The previous history had been mainly a history of men blindly seeking God, "if haply they might find" one who, as the center of a world of dead matter evolving spirit, must presumably be Spirit himself. Christianity now affirmed his existence as a living and loving Personality, responding to the call and rejoicing in the love of man. It was an amazingly great, though surely not at all a strange,

<sup>1</sup> The most characteristic utterance in Hebrew literature shows a conscience, burdened with treachery to a murdered friend, coming to God with the strange words, "Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned," and refusing to depart.

thing to affirm of the Center of the universe. But a greater lay behind. If the center of all is a Personality and a living heart, it may well be that it will not leave initiative to its own creatures of clay. It will not merely be sought and found; it may itself seek. And the special message of the new faith was this, that from an immeasurable distance the Center of things had drawn near, and from an infinite height the Absolute had bowed down, to attract to itself the spirits whom it had made.

In the present age this faith in a Personality of the universe has found assured foothold also in science. But even in the present age it will not be victorious without a struggle. The Latin section of Christianity has exchanged the direct commerce with heaven, which was the privilege of private Christians in the time of the apostolic epistles, for a directorship under the responsibility of the Christian church. The Greek section has still less individualism; and, unlike the other, it has the task of keeping its masses in subjection, not only to an orthodoxy, but to a nationalist imperialism. And before it, as before us all, lies the problem of the yellow and black races; with the persistent suggestion that neither evolution nor Christianity can do anything for them, and that they must be merely drilled and utilized, like other inferior animals, consumers of corn or food for powder. In England, and in Europe generally, the line is not drawn at color; it is the peasant and proletariat mass who have long been excluded by the imaginations of the privileged from counsels of perfection alike in civilization and in Christianity. The white workingmen see the outrage of this clearly enough in their own case, and band together to force their way to most legitimate equal rights. But the socialist leaders are in the meantime disposed to simplify their future by way of making it easier, and to deny the value of all that inner world which cannot be conquered by external organization. And with so many forces pulling backward and pulling together, we are sure to have the attempt to unite them by some underlying philosophy. It will in any case be suggested that nature, which in past ages has been so careful of the type and so careless of the single life, still reckons those things alone to be useful which are useful to the species as a whole; that individualism in spiritual matters is selfishness, and the only fitting object is the



greatest good of the greatest number; and that therefore, if religion is to be recognized at all, it should be religion regulated for the baptized mass, with due regard to its national prejudices and traditions, and maintained for it under an authority which may be described indifferently as that of the church or of the state. And in answer it will have to be again and again pointed out, in the interest of the present and of the future, that Nature is so far from being careful of the type that she makes a thousand types continually pass away, as the lower life in them rises higher; and it seems, indeed, as if her whole interest in successive species were the gradual selection of creatures who, at last, while still full of animal frailty, shall be as gods knowing good and evil, judges of themselves and of her, and facing the precipice of moral responsibility. Such creatures, being molded out of warm clay, learn to feel and to do chiefly through their relations to others around them, loving at first the brother whom they have seen more than the God whom they have not seen. So, too, the individualism of Christianity, when it comes, is found to be one of self-sacrifice and altruism, enlarging rather than destroying our earthly relations. But we need also a higher love. Earthly relations crumble into earth, and the races and the works of men flit before them into the dark; and only the Great Companion is not dead. Sooner or later the craving of science for a central life, and of the heart for its ideal, will together upheave their way through the embattled selfishness of our time; and on both sides of the Atlantic we shall know that, while all things around men pass away, the ancient Lover and Friend of men remains.

But let us return finally to England. The proposal to Englishmen to believe in religion as culture, rather than in God as fact, finds in the English character some things to favor and some to oppose it. The habit of compromise, the desire to mend rather than end whatever is doing any good work, the passion of the uneducated for material fact, the corresponding passion of the educated for historical sequence, the preference of both for the conservative customs of the race, and the disposition of all to accept existing authority so long as it does not definitely press upon either conscience or comfort—these things sooner or later create a willingness to make the best of both worlds and muddle through somehow. But they are,

I believe, more than counterbalanced by the sturdy individuality of the people. The Englishman is not an idealist, and he is certainly not a theorizer. But individuality is in the long run a greater gift than idealism; and there is enough of it in the central stem of our world-wide race to assure us that it will sooner or later break down to the true roots, and burst outward in the highest products of our complex life.

It will probably not do so until the English working class comes to its own. That class includes elements so dissimilar as the keen factory hands of the north and the slow agricultural laborers of the south. But it is one people, and it is really the people of England, for whose benefit all legislation should be undertaken, and by whom all legislation will more and more be controlled. The education, commenced by the school boards and for the moment checked, will be in some form resumed, and will mold the mass into one, while it will at the same time give it political supremacy. That twofold height, when it is attained, may bring the testing-time for the religion of England. For then, and only then, will be fulfilled the great word which dropped from Sir Harry Vane before he went to the scaffold: "The people of England have been long asleep; *they will be hungry when they awake.*" And when they awake, it will not be to any question of class supremacy, especially if class equality has by that time been substantially realized. Rather, the attainment by all citizens of the necessities and comforts of life, in so far as the state can assure these, will instantly reveal the spiritual inheritance beyond, and a corresponding vacuity within which neither trade unions nor imperial unions can do anything to satisfy. But church organizations, too, will not satisfy it. The Catholic claim, to dispense truth to all men and to direct the conscience of each, would make a strong appeal at such a crisis to the national imagination. But, for reasons already indicated, it will probably never be submitted to by the English race. It may be doubted even whether they will take kindly to the quasi-authority of the Protestant aggregate or confessional church, a body of national dimensions founded on a human expression of divine truth. In matters of creed, the English organization of the future may broaden back to the *Areopagitica* of one great Englishman. In the coming evolution the individual is pretty sure at least

to treat mere things of external order—including especially the organizations of the sacerdotalist and the socialist—as matters of very inferior interest. It is much less certain what he will do—will do at least in the first instance—when set free in the other direction to deal individually and positively with religion, and with God in the heart of it.

For it must be confessed that, as man ascends in the evolutionary scale, the elements of his nature take on a greater instability, and it is precisely those who are called to a more glorious future who encounter higher moral risks. He who climbs to the golden bar of heaven, and misses it, may have a crashing fall. It is probably safe to predict that ere long the English masses will be face to face, as they have never been before, with the claims of religion and the higher life. But it would be rash to prophesy that they will embrace those claims—at least, at once. History has had too many cases of failure of a generation of men to listen to the higher call, and these failures may be repeated “as the great ages onward roll.” Yet we seem dimly to discern better things in the later years of the century whose threshold we have been permitted to see. At all times the highest moral results have been attained by men who fixed their gaze, not upon these directly, but upon the central Personality in whom they are gathered up; that is, these results have been attained through religion rather than ethics. This has been eminently so under Christianity. And the attainment has not been by men who accepted a philosophical or ecclesiastical system, but rather by those who suddenly found a bond with a Father reconciled; and, even in their case, most of all in the first tenderness of reconciliation. It is at this stage, too, and in this form that religion, with its priceless ethical accompaniments, has proved to be powerfully sympathetic and even contagious. For within Christianity even more than outside it, man’s experience of religion has come in the way of pulsation and vibration and recurrent waves of life. These are bare facts and phenomena of history, and they might perhaps repeat themselves in the coming England without giving absolute promise of a new dawn. They might be held to be consistent, so far, with the evolution of a merely subjective or psychological religion. Yet if even *that* religion rose so high in the hearts of young Englishmen as to be a passion for the reconciled First

Good and First Fair, we should all be disposed to find in it a golden promise and potency. And if, as these pages suggest, religion is an objective fact of evolution—the gradual recognition by many personalities of the central One—then the main hope may come, not from ourselves, but from the other side. The Center of all life must have infinite initiative, and may well be found in His own time inconceivably responsive to the appeal of man.